

## **Stabilize Soil After Carr, Delta Fires Damage**

**Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Sept. 27, 2018**

This week, Master Gardeners received many questions about soil erosion and where people could get native grass seed or rice straw.

Using rice straw for erosion control has some advantages because it usually does not have the weed or grass seeds that sprout up and then create a fire hazard next season or spread invasive weeds. However, it does have some real disadvantages.

The first drawback is that the straw is compacted and extremely difficult to break up out of large chunks. It takes a lot of effort to get the straw spread over the soil. We use rice straw for weed control in our organic garden here at Shasta College because it's the only certified-organic straw we can find. To break the slices up we use a hay chopper. It's a very slow process.

In order for any straw to work for erosion control it needs to be spread evenly over the soil and be punched in, meaning that you need to do something to push it into the soil.

The second problem with rice straw is that it takes a long time to break down so it may still have straw on the ground next year where oat or wheat straw would decompose.

Consider using mulch, shredded wood chips or erosion fabric instead. You will still have the labor of securing the fabric — punching in the mulch, but it will be easier to spread and just as, if not more, effective.

For advice or assistance with areas that pose potential erosion risk to water sheds, roads or your home, contact the Natural Resource Conservation Service at 691-5843 or email [melinda.graves@ca.usda.gov](mailto:melinda.graves@ca.usda.gov).

### **California native grass and wildflower seeds**

There are a few sources for bulk native grass seed.

The native wildflower seed we use was donated by Hedgerow Farms, in Winters, California. It contained a custom mix of central valley pollinator wildflowers that included clarkia, California poppy, gum plant, lupine, yarrow and Phacelia. This mix only needs to be seeded at a rate of 8.5 pounds per acre, so even though the seed mix is more expensive than some of the other erosion-control mixes you're not using as much.

Grass seed is usually applied at a rate of 30 to 40 pounds per acre, depending on the type of grass you're planting.

Another source of bulk California wildflower or native grass seed is Pacific Coast Seed.

If you're just trying to stabilize a more urban area you might consider purchasing a non- native erosion control mix that contains rye grass and crimson clover, as these tend to sprout up quickly and are very affordable. They may require a bit of weed whacking in the spring but usually do not produce a lot of heavy grass.

These seed mixes can be found at feed and landscape supply stores. I purchased a 50-pound bag of erosion control seed mix from Palo Cedro Feed for around \$35 and that covered about an acre.

Regardless of the seed you choose make sure to rake, drag or roll it in to get good soil contact or it will not germinate very well.

*The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email [mastergardener@shastacollege.edu](mailto:mastergardener@shastacollege.edu). The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.*