

Grow-in fine turf with blankets

*Wheat straw becomes popular for landscaping,
thanks to its revegetation capabilities.*

By RUSSELL GRUBER AND PETE HANRAHAN

Wheat straw erosion control blankets reduce soil loss, protect seed and assist with vegetation establishment.

The blankets consist of a layer of biodegradable mulch stitched to one or two layers of natural or synthetic netting. Weighing about one half pound per square yard, the blankets are light and easy to handle. A 60 square yard roll weighs 30 pounds.

Close ground contact

Manufactured wheat straw blankets are engineered to avoid many of the problems associated with loose straw mulching. An evenly distributed mulch layer is stitched to a photodegradable or biodegradable netting. The netting holds the mulch material in close contact with the ground, while the stitching assures the retention of straw fiber throughout the blanket, even when subjected to water flow or high winds.

Straw blankets are made to offer erosion protection during turf establishment, and to assist the turf establishment. The correct amount of fiber is essential to opti-

mal performance in both the erosion control and seed germination functions.

Weed infiltration is a concern when establishing fine turf, and wheat straw does not have the weed impurities associated with hay. Erosion blankets give the landscape contractor control over seed mixtures, fertilizers and topsoil. The stand of vegetation adapted to the specific site conditions can be established.

Erosion blankets help establish a strong root system. Wheat straw blankets hold moisture from rainfall and condensation close to the soil surface, and aid in obtaining a higher and more efficient seed germination than other blanket types.

Protect dormant seedings

Blankets can offer erosion control protection for dormant seeding throughout the winter months. This, of course, allows the seed to take full advantage of early spring moisture. The earlier turf can become established in the spring, the better chance it has to survive heat and drought stress during summer.

A customer who wants a green lawn immediately will not get it by using erosion control blankets. Sod installation is the only answer.

Straw blankets give job sites a finished look, especially when installed in accordance with manufacturer's specifications, using the proper number of staples and assuring blanket-to-ground contact.

Sod quality can vary greatly. For the serious landscaping contractor, it's important to know the best sources of quality sod. On the other hand, the blanket method gives the landscaper more control over the final product.

The straw blanket is certainly no cure-all. If the top soil used on the site is infested with weed seeds, the blankets will not eliminate them. A poor installation will undermine the effectiveness of any product or material used.

Estimates vary, but the use of the blanket package, compared to sod, can result in a cost savings of up to 50 percent.

Some landscapers who want a strong stand of turf have decided they want to use the straw blanket method. Those who have not done so may wish to consider it as an affordable, efficient method of turf establishment. **LM**

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A 60 square-yard roll of wheat straw blanket weighs only 30 pounds.