

## Seed Testing Reminder

As spring approaches, it is important to remind producers about germination requirements of any purchased seed or carryover seed they may be using for NRCS cost-share programs. Germination testing is important to help assure that proper seeding rates are being planted. When seed is sold, seed laws in each state specify a limit for the age of a germination test (Table 1). These requirements also apply to seed used for NRCS cost share programs. When a producer purchases seed, they should verify that germination testing dates meet their State seed law and NRCS program rules. Seed that is stored or carried over by a producer also needs to meet the germination testing standard. Seed vendors are aware of testing requirements, but it is easy to forget about retesting older purchased seed stored in a bin or shop. Seed lots with test dates that do not meet the standard need to have a new germination test run by an accredited seed testing lab (a tetrazolium test is not an acceptable substitute for a germination test). Even if germination testing is not required, a new test may be warranted if seed has been improperly stored. Heat and high humidity can greatly reduce germination and are the major killers of stored seed. Germination tests for grass and forb species generally take 14 to 28 days, so it is important to plan ahead.

**Table 1. Maximum Germination Test Age**

| State        | Native Grass and Forbs | Agricultural Crops | Lawn and Turf Grass |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| North Dakota | 12 months              | 9 months           | 15 months           |
| South Dakota | 9 months               | 9 months           | 9 months            |
| Minnesota    | 15 months              | 12 months          | 15 months           |

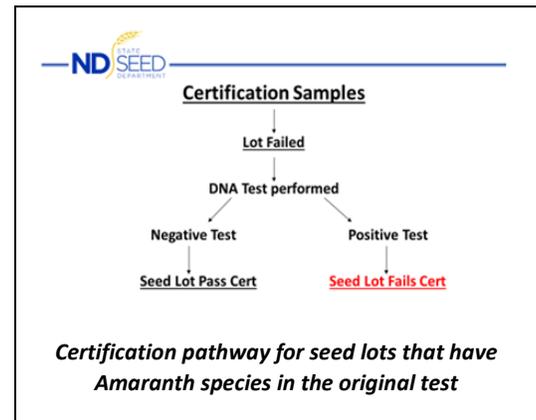
*(The test date month does not count toward months listed)*

## Seed Quality

The importance of seed quality and variety cannot be overstated! Customers of vendors who provide perennial grass, forb, and legume seed often rely solely on the vendor to determine what seed gets included in the mix. However, it is the responsibility of the customer to ensure that their purchased seed meets the criteria for species, cultivars (varieties), and quality standards that work best for their location and environment. The customer should request certified seed whenever possible, and make sure the cultivars are adapted to their location. If their seeding is tied to cost-share programs, the seed mix must meet the guidelines established by the local USDA Service Center. The USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Program has conducted studies and field trials over many decades to evaluate and provide cultivars that are best suited for planting in this region. The Bismarck Plant Materials Center (PMC) continues to work tirelessly to provide quality Foundation seed to area growers who increase this seed and provide it to area vendors. Hopefully, seed customers will spend a little extra time to ensure their seed meets the highest standards for quality and adaptability to their location.

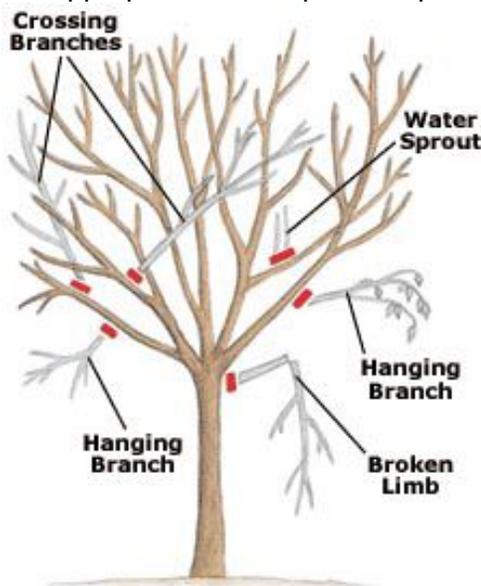
## Invasive Weeds

New Invasive and Noxious Weeds have recently been added to state prohibited noxious weed lists in our area. All seed and crop producers are advised to be aware of those changes. A noxious weed of major concern is Palmer Amaranth (*Amaranthus palmeri*), which continues to spread northward and can be mistaken for one of its amaranth cousins, pigweed or waterhemp. Seed that meets certification standards cannot contain any Palmer amaranth seed. All Foundation seed from the PMC is tested and certified by the ND State Seed Lab. They have added a new standard for seed that contains any amaranth species found in their normal seed test. If amaranth is visually detected in the sample, the seed lot will fail certification. However, the amaranth species in the sample can be DNA tested to determine if Palmer amaranth is present. If the DNA test is negative for Palmer amaranth, the seed lot will pass certification, if other standards are met. If Palmer amaranth is present, the seed lot will fail certification. There are good resources available from each state's Department of Agriculture and local Extension offices that provide detailed information on identification and control of this and other invasive and prohibited noxious weeds.



## Tis the Season for Pruning Trees and Shrubs

There are a variety of reasons to consider pruning trees and shrubs in yard landscapes and shelterbelts, including safety, shape or structure, health, growth rejuvenation, and improved flowering and fruit production. The appropriate time to prune depends on the type of plant, its condition, and the results desired. Light pruning can be done at any time of the year. Unwanted growth is most easily removed while it is small, and early removal will have less of a dwarfing effect. Broken, dead, weak, or heavily shaded branches can be trimmed with little or no effect on a plant regardless of timing.



Most deciduous plants can be pruned any time during the dormant period between leaf-fall and spring growth. Pruning in late winter, just before spring growth starts, leaves fresh wounds exposed for only a short length of time before new growth begins the wound sealing process. Some of the most common plants which should be pruned in late winter include green ash, willow, oak, and fruit trees such as apple, hawthorn, mountain ash, and crabapple. Winter pruning results in a vigorous burst of new growth in the spring.

It is important to note that some early-blooming tree species set buds on last year's growth. If pruned over the winter, they may not bloom. Instead, these species should be pruned right after the tree finishes blooming. Early-blooming trees include apricot, chokecherry, ornamental cherry, flowering plum, chokeberry, juneberry, lilac, and early-blooming spirea.

Most evergreens (conifers) require little pruning and should normally be pruned to only remove defective growth. Spruce and fir don't grow continuously and can be pruned any time because they have lateral buds that will sprout if terminal buds are removed. Pine put on a single flush of tip growth each spring and then stop growing, so it is important to prune them before the new needles mature. Removal of terminal buds will remove the growing point and leave a dead stub. Arborvitae, juniper, yew, and hemlock grow continuously throughout the growing season and can be pruned any time through mid-summer.