

O R E G O N G R O W N

W A I I

Fescue

THE ALL-AROUND TURFGRASS

TALL FESCUE / the all-around turfgrass that's been around for years

On the cover : Newer, improved tall fescue produces an ideal low-maintenance shade, drought, and wear tolerant lawn.

Right : Turf-type tall fescue is finer bladed and darker green than its pasture ancestry.

Below : Today's turf-type tall fescues are naturally finer-leaved, darker color, and require less mowing than older types.

Since its beginnings as a palatable pasture grass, turfgrass breeders have made bold improvements in tall fescue. Tall fescues have inherent shade, drought, heat, cold, and wear tolerance. They are also deep-rooted. Older tall fescue varieties, however, lacked the dark green color, fine leaves, and inbred disease and insect resistance.

Tall fescues are widely adapted and thrive in the Transition Zone northward, and in the temperate regions along the east and west coasts.

Tall fescue for turf is best planted in September to early October; or March and April, allowing the turf to become established before summer heat sets in. Seeding at 8 to 10 lbs. per 1000 sq. ft. discourages



weeds and clumping (250 to 450 lbs per acre for roadsides, athletic fields, and golf course roughs).

September and November fertilizer applications should include 1 to 1½ lbs. actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. Fertilizing in November keeps turf green longer in the fall, and promotes early spring green-up. Early spring fertilization should be avoided to prevent excessive top growth (rather than root development) and weed growth. Application of 1 lb. slow release nitrogen fertilizer in May is recommended.

Germination will take place in a week or so, with first mowing when seedlings reach a height of 3 inches. Turf-type tall fescues are best mowed at 2 to 3 inches, and up to 3½ inches during the summer months. Mow often enough to remove only 1/3 of the grass blade at one time, then leave the clippings to decompose and add nutrients to the soil.

County extension agents advise homeowners as to soil types, annual rainfall, plus identification and control of insect pests and turf diseases in their region. Other home





owners hire lawn and landscape professionals to maintain their turf areas. They recommend weed and insect measures, aerification, and other management practices to avoid potential problems. Plus, home and garden centers and book stores carry a myriad of self-help publications for the do-it-yourselfer.

Turfgrass professionals such as sod producers, parks and athletic field managers, and golf course superintendents have long favored tall fescue's naturally beneficial characteristics. Tall fescue characteristics include *wear tolerance* on playgrounds, athletic fields, golf course roughs, and horse racing tracks; *heat and drought tolerance* for areas along paved highways and bunker faces on golf courses, plus *shade tolerance* for parks and industrial campuses.

With constant improvements in color, disease resistance, slower growth rate, and lower mowing heights, tall fescues are found in more and more high profile landscapes.

You'd think tall fescue was a totally new concept with the raves it gets, when, in fact, it's been around doing what it does for years.

Above : Pasture-types of tall fescue remains a nourishing, drought tolerant trample-resistant grass for horses and

beef cattle, while turf-types provide wear-tolerant race tracks as well as athletic fields, parks, and playgrounds.

Below : Picturesque Santa Barbara County Courthouse in Santa Barbara, California, has a tall fescue lawn at its front entrance.



TALL FESCUE / replacing bermudagrass roughs at Kansas City CC



Loren Breedlove, superintendent of Kansas City Country Club, prefers the improved, finer-bladed tall fescues compared with bermudagrass, below.

Below, center and right : sod cutting and removing common bermudagrass after two applications of ROUNDUP® non-selective herbicide.

Nearly all grass types thrive in the Transition Zone. Common bermudagrass roughs and bunker surrounds at the historic Kansas City Country Club were troublesome to members who would entangle their irons and wedges in the extensive runners. Superintendent Loren Breedlove is successfully converting the years old, invasive bermuda to improved, turf-type tall fescue, realizing the benefits of better playability, consistency, drought and shade tolerance, plus year-round color.

“Tall fescue is well-adapted to the Mission Hills area of Kansas, and the finer-leaved varieties are used more and more in home lawns and parks that were once zoysia or bermudagrass,” Loren says. “Deep-rooted tall fescue is ideally suited for the established trees, clay/loam soil, and seasonal climate extremes at our course.”

“We began the conversion program by spraying the bermudagrass with an application of ROUNDUP® with a little FUSILADE®, added for a better kill, then another application in three to four more weeks. That resulted in about a 90 percent bermudagrass kill. Any persisting bermuda is taken out of the fescue with FUSILADE when needed. Tall fescue pretty well tolerates FUSILADE and some other chemical tools useful in controlling bermuda.”

To have certain high-traffic areas in play quicker, Loren’s crew cuts and strips the old turf, then replaces it with tall fescue sod. This includes green surrounds and some bunker faces and noses.

“Tall fescue takes the intense heat of sun reflecting off bunker sand,” Loren says, “and the deep rooting once it is established holds the steep banks and gives us the benefit of drought tolerance where the water tends to run off. On steep slopes where sodding is impractical, we’ll mow as tight as possible and overseed with tall fescue.”



TALL FESCUE / better breeding and expert production for quality seed

Tall Fescue Characteristics

compared with other cool-season grasses

Growth habit	.....Bunch type
Establishment rate	.....Medium
Leaf growth rate	.....Medium
Thatch formation	.....Low to medium
Competes with weeds/grasses	..Low to medium
Drought tolerance	.....Very good
Shade tolerance	.....Very good
Cold tolerance	.....Very good
Traffic and wear tolerance	...Very good
Number of seeds per pound	..225,000

Recommended Seeding Rates

for 100% tall fescue turf

Home lawns	....8 to 10 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft.
Sod production (with netting)	...450 lbs./acre
Parks, athletic fields	.....350-450 lbs./acre
Highways and median strips	....250 lbs./acre
Golf course roughs	.....250-350 lbs./acre

for tall fescue with 10% Kentucky bluegrass

Sod production	.....250 lbs./acre
Home lawns	.....4-6 lbs./1000 sq. ft.
Parks, athletic fields250 lbs./acre

fertilization rate

Actual N per year2-3 lbs.
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Production of highest quality seed requires attention to detail in all steps from planting through fertilization, inspections, eliminating weeds and off-type plants, swathing, combining, cleaning, bagging, testing, and shipping to market. The only thing left to chance is weather, which is one of the reasons Oregon can boast it is the *Grass Seed Capital of the World*.

Located half way between the North Pole and the equator, Oregon has the ideal amount of sun and precipitation for farming, and grass seed production in particular.

Since Plant Variety Protection Act (PVP) began in 1970, private plant breeders have made improvements in all cool-season species, with tall fescue making some of the greatest strides in becoming a preferred turf-grass. Some refinements include dwarf-type varieties requiring less mowing than older types, inclusion of endophytes for natural pest resistance, and Brown Patch resistance where heat and humidity pressures present problems with disease.

Below : Combined tall fescue seed is transferred to trucks which haul it to a nearby warehouse where the seed is stored in large, dedicated bins to await cleaning. Great care is taken that seed is not accidentally mixed with that from another field.





Left : Tall fescue seed, as well as other cool-season species produced in Oregon, goes through a number of processes to clear away foreign matter, other seed species, if present, and remove light seeds that won't germinate – leaving only the highest quality product to be bagged.

A lot number is stenciled onto each bag, and is repeated on analysis and certification blue tags so growers, seed testing laboratories, marketers, as well as customers can trace the field of origin.

Below : Cleaned tall fescue seed.

Oregon has the largest number of full-time professional grass seed growers in the world to manage the production process. These highly educated stewards of the land are independent business people with large acreages, investments in specialized equipment, and are totally committed to producing the highest quality seed.

Growers attend university extension and private breeding company field days to learn of the latest improvement in varieties and management techniques.

Timely crop planting, fertilizing, and irrigation is key to seed viability prior to harvest. Swathing and combining when moisture content is optimum raises yield numbers.

All seed is sampled and submitted to a certified testing lab for stringent purity and germination tests. Nearly all of the tall and fine fescue seed produced in Oregon is entered in the state's certification program. The Certification Blue Tag means the seed has met purity standards plus the breeder's Plant Variety Protection quality specifications

including field history and two pre-harvest inspections by Oregon State University.

A number of seed production companies have developed their own seed quality standards, backed by the company's reputation.

Our continuing reputation as grass seed producer to the world is riding on the quality of the contents of every seed package, bag, or container tagged with *Origin : Oregon*.



“Tall fescue complements our zoysia fairways and bentgrass greens, and we don’t have the encroachment maintenance problems we had with bermudagrass,” Loren says. “Bermuda runners would creep in all directions — into bunkers, fairways, and over and under cartpaths. Bermuda runners would creep under a cartpath and come out the other side. Tall fescue stays put.

“The fescue takes several heights of step cutting — from 1¼ to 1½ inches primary to 2½ to 3 inches in the secondary rough,” says Loren. “Tall fescue stripes nicely, and its tight, upright growth holds the ball up and releases it without club entanglement.

“Fescue thrives under our mature trees and grows right up to the trunks without competing with roots for moisture and nutrients. We’ve replaced bermuda in the heavily shaded area in front of the clubhouse and receive favorable comments from the membership about playability as well as appearance.

“We fertilize with 2 to 2½ pounds of actual Nitrogen per year, with a half-pound in the spring and 1½ to 2 pounds in the fall. We’ll do a FUSILADE touch-up when necessary.



The fescues stay green in the fall long after the zoysiagrass fairways have gone off-color, and way longer than the old common bermuda would have gone dormant and turned yellow. And with tall fescue establishing deep roots, we’re more and more able to cut back on water.

“With its natural tendencies like drought, wear, and shade tolerance; and varietal improvements like naturally darker color, insect and disease resistance, shorter growth habit and better mowing — tall fescue is a dream to work with.”

Above : Kansas City Country Club primary roughs stripe beautifully when mowed at 1¼ to 1½ inches high, and secondary roughs are mowed from 2½ to 3 inches.

Lower left : tall fescue sod replaces bermudagrass bunker faces at The Nicklaus Golf Club at Lionsgate, Overland Park, Kansas; Jeff Eldridge, CGCS, superintendent.

Lower right : Kansas City Country Club members appreciate how upright tall fescue sets up the ball and releases it nicely.

