

CHOOSING GRASSES FOR LAWNS

In Nebraska and Kansas

Choosing the proper grass species and cultivar is essential for maximizing performance as well as significantly reducing irrigation, fertility, pesticide, and other management inputs compared to using the wrong grass

Tall fescue has been considered a versatile grass because it can perform well in a variety of environments. The tall fescues grow well in a wide range of soil fertility, soil textures, and pH. Tall fescue is susceptible to brown patch which can thin the turf. However, unlike Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue is not affected by summer patch or necrotic ring spot and white grubs rarely cause damage in tall fescue. High fertility increases susceptibility to disease and damage from abiotic stresses. A nitrogen range of 1 to 3 lbs N/1000 sq ft/yr should be used. Tall fescue produces an impressive root system providing a means of persisting during periods of

poor growth conditions. Under low management conditions this extensive root system generally mines the soil of essential nutrients and moisture causing reduced turf quality after a few years, unless the moisture is maintained and nutrients are returned to the soil. This deep root system allows tall fescue to stay green longer in drought than other cool season grasses like Kentucky bluegrass.

However, tall fescue has minimal drought survival if extended drought conditions persist to the point of tall fescue leaves turning fully brown or dormant. Tall fescue has the coarsest texture of any of the species commonly used for turf in the Great Plains region, but leaf width of modern cultivars is similar to Kentucky bluegrass.

Tall fescue should be mowed at 3.5

inches.

It is generally a bunch type species, but some of the newer rhizomatous tall fescue (RTF) varieties are weakly rhizomatous. Tall fescue has good wear and abiotic stress tolerance once it has been established for more than one year, with the exception of cold tolerance which can damage and thin the turf. Though tall fescue is the best adapted grass for lawns in eastern Nebraska with relatively high summer humidity and rainfall, tall fescue's relative poor winter tolerance limits its use for lawns in central to primarily eastern Nebraska.

Ask your local seed specialist for advice on what your goal is for your lawn.

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