



GRAU'S Answers to Turf Questions

By FRED V. GRAU

In the days before Kentucky 31 fescue came on the market, the late O. J. Noer used to call me "Alta fescue Grau" because, on the "Orpheum Circuit," I constantly encouraged superintendents to give this grass a trial.

At Beltsville in 1947, I engineered the seeding of the 17-acre front lawn to Alta fescue because, at that time, one couldn't find enough Kentucky 31 fescue.

Over the years, we have seen the tremendous upsurge of Kentucky 31 fescue seed production and the almost universal use of tall fescues for roadside turf. Alta largely has tended to remain in the West, while Kentucky 31 seems to be preferred in the eastern half of the country.

The subject of tall fescue at a superintendent's meeting elicits mixed reactions, some bordering on the profane. Some swear by it; others at it.

For turf, these attributes for tall fescues are rated "plus":

- (1) Deep-rooted.
- (2) Highly resistant to drought, heat, cold, insects, diseases, salt, acid, alkali, weeds, chemicals.
- (3) Good color.
- (4) Responds well to fertilizer.
- (5) Tolerant to sun or shade.
- (6) Wide adaptation to climate and soil.

On the "minus" side, these features often are cited:

- (1) Coarse and ugly.
- (2) Grows in clumps.
- (3) Won't stand close mowing.
- (4) Hard to mow.
- (5) Throws seed heads.

Those who have worked with tall fescues long enough to understand them and to appreciate their good qualities have learned to minimize the "minus" qualities by adhering to the following:

(1) Heavy rates of seeding, up to 10 lbs. to 1,000 sq. ft. This would cost about the same as 2-3 lbs. of Merion or 3-4 lbs. of Pennlawn.

(2) Heavy rates of slow-release nitrogen (plus P & K, of course) in seedbed to develop solid turf and shut out weeds.

(3) Adequate maintenance fertilization to keep turf vigorous, to reduce seed-head formation and to make mowing much easier.

Solid tall fescue turf can withstand closer mowing than isolated plants because the dense turf holds the mowers up.

Many golf course roughs are "rough" because of tall fescues which are versatile and can be clipped to suit player demands from the discriminating woman country clubber to the golf professional who respects a challenge on the way to a win.

Some golf course fairways, especially where water is a problem, are being seeded to Kentucky 31 fescue. A course in California (Morro Bay) has good fairway turf of Alta fescue. No other grass could tolerate the high saline content.

We can anticipate finer-bladed tall fescues in the future that can tolerate closer mowing. Many homeowners are turning to tall fescues for more trouble-free maintenance. Athletic fields over a wide area lean heavily on this grass. The trend is unmistakable. Many are working on improved selections •