

## Off The Fringe

# Looking 'Fine' and Dandy

FINE FESCUES MAKING THEIR MARK, ACCORDING TO SEED RESEARCHERS

By Ron Hall

Until recently, fine fescues have, to some extent, been the forgotten stepchild in the turf-grass picture. Bluegrasses, ryegrasses

and turf-type tall fescues have generated the most excitement regarding breeding advancements and new varieties. But these popular cool-season species now have to share the spotlight

with fine fescues. The fine-leaved, bunch-type grass, known for its cold tolerance and environmental benefits, has boosted its popularity.

"The idea of looking at alternative grasses that use less fertilizer and water is what we're looking at," said Wayne Horman, at the recent Scotts Professional Seed/Pure-Seed Testing Field Day in Rolesville, N.C. "These are attributes of fine fescues, along with their ability to survive and look good in moderate shade."

Horman, national accounts manager for Scotts Professional Seed, said golf course superintendents especially are getting the message, often taking out five to eight acres of other species and replacing them with fine fescues because of the savings to their fertilizer and water budgets.

"We're going to try to take these grasses a step further," said Horman about the breeding and selection program at the North Carolina research farm. "We're going to try everything with them."

Kevin Turner, who heads Scotts Professional Seed Oregon program, reiterated Horman's comments regarding fine fescue's usefulness. "Fine fescue is an under-utilized grass," he said.

One visitor to the field day said fine fescue is a grass that "really wants to be left alone and ignored, and generally doesn't like a lot of fertilizer, water or even a lot of maintenance."

As an interesting side note to the field day, David Huff, Ph.D., associate professor of turfgrass breeding and genetics at Penn State University, said there is confusion surrounding the identification and marketing of the various types of fine fescues, generally broken down into creeping red, chewings, sheep and hard fescues.

Huff suggested renaming the types as blue hard fescue and American sheep fescue to tell them apart and to aid architects and others when they specify a particular type of fine fescue for a project. ■



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