

## BEAUMONT MEADOW FESCUE

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The cool season turfgrass needs have been well served by about a half dozen of the tens of thousands of cool season grasses available. A great turfgrass potential exists among some of these for many current needs. Plant breeders seldom initiate breeding programs to eliminate the undesirable character or two that may exist, due to complex inheritance problems.

In the late '50s, Dr. Fred Elliott of the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences of Michigan State University noted some fine leaved plants in plots he was evaluating for forage use. These had been acquired as tall fescue introductions, and he called them to Dr. Jim Beard's attention. Dr. Beard established several plots in mixture with 50% Merion Kentucky Bluegrass. Four survived several years in competition with Merion as an attractive turfgrass blending very nicely with the Kentucky Bluegrass. Three of these introductions originated in Yugoslavia and one was from Switzerland. The mixture could be detected easily only after the first frost of fall at which time the fescue discolored more rapidly than the Kentucky Bluegrass.

Dr. Beard noted this compatibility and persistence and recognized the potential for a wear-tolerant turf. This appeared to be a grass that would survive in a mixture with the very aggressive Merion Kentucky Bluegrass and have the winterhardiness to survive in the Northern States. At present no winter hardy tall fescues are available for Michigan.

Plugs were taken from each of the four sources and individual plants sprigged into a spored-plant nursery. Selected plants from each of the four sources were polycrossed. Seed was sent to Oregon for a two acre increase.

After the seedlings had been established and allowed to grow to a mature plant stage it became apparent that this was not a tall fescue. It was a Meadow Fescue (*Festuca elatior*). Seed from this increase was distributed widely for testing. Results were sufficiently encouraging that the cultivar was named Beaumont and released. The name was selected because Beaumont was the pioneer physician on Mackinaw Island who discovered the principles of digestion. We look at this grass as a pioneer in its mission, as no Meadow Fescue has been developed primarily for turfgrass use.

The features which will serve turfgrass interests by this grass are as follows:

- 1) Excellent winterhardiness.
- 2) A relatively narrow leaf blade that blends well in appearance with Kentucky Bluegrass.
- 3) The ability to compete in a mixture with Kentucky Bluegrass.
- 4) As yet it is not subject to turfgrass diseases in the cool regions but it is more susceptible to diseases, particularly Helminthosporium, in warm climates.
- 5) Very good mowing qualities.
- 6) Is tolerant to poorly drained soils.
- 7) Does not require high management levels to maintain acceptable turf.
- 8) It is a bunch grass and should be seeded with a bluegrass or a creeping red fescue. (Studies have not been conducted with the latter mixture.)
- 9) It does not equal tall fescue or perennial ryegrass in wear tolerance; thus this cultivar does not have a potential for high wear areas such as athletic fields.

- 10) It is suggested that Beaumont will serve a need in parks, cemeteries, large industrial lawns, roadsides and should make excellent turfgrass rough on golf courses.

Michigan State University has released Beaumont as a proprietary cultivar to Lofts' Pedigreed Seed, Inc. of Bound Brook, New Jersey. E. F. Burlingham and Sons of Forest Grove, Oregon, are producing the seed.

A two-acre field for Foundation Seed was established in 1977 in Oregon. Seed for Certified Fields should be available in 1978. Limited supplies will be available for planting in Fall, 1979, with adequate supplies thereafter. A plant patent will be applied for.

It is felt that this grass will provide a medium to low management turf area where a high degree of quality is not essential.