

LAWNGRASSES

Confused about which new turf varieties will work best for home lawns? The executive director of The Better Lawn and Turf Institute tells what to look for in choosing good grass.

by Eliot C. Roberts, Ph.D., The Lawn Institute

The new generation of improved lawngrasses is well recognized for helping lower maintenance costs and increase quality and persistence of the turf throughout cool, humid regions of the country.

Grasses bred to have darker green foliage are not likely to be over-fertilized in an attempt to improve color. So turf is maintained without stimulation leading to excess growth. This only weakens the grass and requires more frequent mowing. Savings on fertilizer costs can be significant.

New grasses developed for disease resistance are far superior to common types. Since disease conditions come and go, the task of chemical control is difficult and costly. Use of blends and mixtures of lawngrasses with improved resistance to one or more of the several common fungus pathogens builds hardiness and added beauty into a lawn. It also saves money.

Cultivars are now available with greatly increased insect resistance. Some even contain endophytes. These organisms live within lawngrass plants without harming the grass in any way. They cause the turf to be undesirable for insect infestation.

These types of biological insect control are permanent with the establishment of the sod. They may well eliminate or at least greatly reduce the need for some insecticides. Improvements of this type are meaningful in our attempt to reduce pollution and improve environmental quality.

Weeds cannot get a seedling start in a turf that has formed a good, dense stand and maintains that stand through the growing season. The new proprietary named grasses that have

been selected and bred for this kind of growth habit and vigor are the first line of defense against weeds.

Sod produced from these grasses is like "money in the bank" when it comes to savings on the cost of herbicides for lawn maintenance.

The Lawn Institute supports a Variety Review Board to evaluate the relative performance of new varieties of lawngrass marketed throughout

the United States and Canada. Each year, 40 to 50 of the best cultivars are selected for special recognition. With some 300 cultivars under evaluation in the United States and Canada, there is a wealth of superior germ plasm available.

Consumer interest in new grasses is taken into consideration. As turf-type perennial ryegrasses and tall fescues have become more popular, in-



Use of blends adds beauty to a lawn.

Turf Guide for Improved Turfgrasses

Species	Growth Habit	Establish Rate	Nitrogen Requirement	Mowing Frequency	Close Mowing Tolerance (1/2" or less)	Traffic Tolerance	Drought Tolerance	Competitiveness	Thatch Formation	Shade Tolerance	Cold Tolerance	Seeding Rate/1000 sq.ft.
Improved Turf-Type Kentucky Bluegrass	Spreads by rhizomes	Slow	Medium	Low to medium	Fair	Good	Good	Medium	Medium to high	Fair to good	Very good	2-3 lbs.
Improved Turf-Type Perennial Ryegrass	Bunch type	Very fast	Medium to high	High	Very good	Excellent	Very good	High	None	Fair to good	Fair to good	5 lbs.
Improved Hard Fescue	Bunch type	Slow to medium	Low	Low	Poor	Good	Excellent	Medium	Medium	Very good	Very good	4-5 lbs.
Improved Chewings Fescue	Bunch type	Medium	Low to medium	Low to medium	Good	Fair	Good	High	Medium to high	Very good	Very good	4 lbs.
Improved Creeping Fescue	Spreads by rhizomes	Medium	Low to medium	Low to medium	Poor	Poor	Good	Medium	Low to medium	Very good	Very good	4 lbs.
Improved Tall Fescue	Bunch type	Medium	Medium	Medium	Poor	Very good	Excellent	Medium	Low to none	Good	Good	6-9 lbs.
Improved Creeping Bentgrass	Spreads by stolons	Medium	Low to medium	Low to medium	Excellent	Good	Poor to fair	High	High	Fair	Excellent	1/2-1 lb.

Compiled By: SEED RESEARCH OF ORECON, INC

creasing numbers of these grasses have been listed. This helps to provide better cultivar availability on a broad geographic base since not all cultivars are marketed uniformly across the country. As interest and use of a lawngrass declines, fewer cultivars are listed. Those remaining are the ones readily available in regions of the country where these grasses are best adapted.

No one cultivar will perform equally well under the wide variation of soil, climate and use found across the United States and Canada. Cultivars are selected to provide as

wide a range of adaptation as possible. Local trials and cooperative extension recommendations, of course, are helpful in making a final selection. For this reason, several of each type cultivar; i.e., bluegrass, fine fescues, perennial ryegrass, turf-type tall fescue, bentgrass and specialty grass are listed.

Weed-free bluegrass

Of all lawngrasses, none are better sod forming than the Kentucky bluegrasses. Underground stems grow through the soil and send up new shoots at intervals to form the tightest,

most dense turf possible.

Since a seedling weed and a Kentucky bluegrass plant cannot both occupy the same spot at the same time, weeds fail to become established in a healthy, vigorous bluegrass turf. The new named bluegrass varieties found in premium seed blends and mixtures have been developed with more heat and drought tolerance and with greater insect and disease resistance to make the turf persistent in crowding out weeds through the entire year.

With an abundant supply of weed seed always present in the soil, a vigorous bluegrass lawn is needed

Lawn Institute lists favorites

Here are the Lawn Institute's 1988 preferred variety selections, as made by its Variety Review Board:

KENTUCKY BLUEGRASSES: Adelphi, Estate, Sydsport, Merit, Huntsville, Nassau, Glade, Fylking, Baron, Ram I, Arboretum, Monopoly, America, Nugget, Rugby, Eclipse, Gnome and A-34 Bensun.

TALL FESCUE: Pennant, Hounddog, Arid, Rebel II, Galway and Mustang.

PERENNIAL RYEGRASS: All*Star, Pennant, Regal, Gator, Derby, Delray, Fiesta II, Manhattan II and Ranger.

FINE FESCUES: Banner, Koket, Ensylva, Reliant and Jamestown.

(Turfgrass managers should always be sure to check with local extension agents concerning adaptability of certain varieties to their area.)

fine fescues give way and provide needed room; as other conditions may reduce growth of bluegrasses, fine fescues move in and fill in the space so that a high quality ground cover is maintained.

Versatile perennial ryegrass

The new turf-type perennial ryegrasses are the most versatile of any lawngrasses available. They germinate rapidly, can be used by themselves or with other grasses in seed mixtures. They are used successfully to establish a new lawn or to improve an old one by overseeding into a poor quality turf. They are truly a do-it-yourself lawngrass.

These grasses do not form thatch and are easy to maintain on low budgets.

Disease and insect resistance help to eliminate need for use of pest control chemicals. And, when something does go wrong, it's easy just to let the disease or insect infestation run its course and then start new turf, simply by seeding over the injured areas.

Hardy tall fescues

Turf-type tall fescues have established a fine reputation for hardiness

throughout spring, summer and fall to prevent weed seedlings from getting a start.

Fine fescues to start

Spring and fall are the best times to seed lawngrasses. And, premium seed mixtures will contain from 30 to 50 percent fine fescues to see that all grasses get off to a good start. Fine fescues germinate quickly and establish rapidly in either sun or shade. They have low fertilizer require-

ments and thus do not compete adversely with other slower growing grasses in the mixture.

Fine fescues separate grasses of different species and create a population of plants with improved vigor and disease resistance. They function as good companion grasses in lawn establishment, and then develop into a permanent component of the sod that helps create a high degree of hardiness and ease of maintenance.

As conditions favor bluegrasses,



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in development of lawns where growth conditions are less than ideal. They take heat down through the transition zone and even into the upper South. Whereas the old Kentucky 31 fescue made an open, often weed-infested lawn, the new turf-type tall fescues create a more dense weed-resistant turf.

These grasses do not develop thatch and feature improved insect and disease resistance. Thus, they have desirable low-maintenance characteristics. Perhaps the most im-

portant asset of the turf-type tall fescues is their ability to grow deep roots through a large volume of soil. These roots use water and nutrients efficiently and make the lawn trouble free and easier to maintain. Most uniform turf is produced when turf-type tall fescues are seeded alone.

Some mixtures with other grasses are available. Blends of two or more fescues are popular. When starting a new turf-type tall fescue lawn, prepare the soil well and then use either seed or sod.

Specialty lawngrasses

Some residences are so located that soils and climate make use of a specialty lawngrass desirable.

- Lawns in cool, moist climates—Exeter colonial bentgrass from Pickseed West makes a beautiful, uniform lawn where summer night temperatures are cool and natural rainfall or irrigation provides frequent light watering.

This grass can be clipped closer than any other lawngrass— $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch—and by means of above-ground runners, makes the densest turf possible. Seeded with as much as 75 percent fine fescues, Exeter establishes quickly and is easy to maintain. Turf is tolerant of acid soils and cold winters.

- Lawns in moist shady loca-

Senior citizens all over the country find it easy to scratch in a little ryegrass seed from time to time, put on a little water and then enjoy watching the lawn turn green.

tions—Sabre *Poa trivialis* from International Seeds is the ideal grass for moist shade. Whereas fine fescues do well in dry shade, Sabre is better on wet soils. Seed germinates rapidly to produce a fine textured turf. It blends in well with other lawngrasses.

- Lawns with alkaline soils—Fults alkaligrass from Northrup King is a low-growing, bunchgrass with excellent salt and high pH tolerance. Plants are leafy and leaves are narrow. For lawns on alkaline soils or where roadside salting during winter months results in sodium chloride contamination of parking and lawn soils, Fults is ideal.

- Lawns for low maintenance semi-turf—Some soils are so poor and some growth conditions so inferior that lawngrasses cannot be grown without costly soil modification. Reubens Canada bluegrass from Jacklin Seed can be used to produce a semi-turf ground cover with essentially no maintenance needed, only occasional mowing.

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For more information, contact: The Lawn Institute, County Line Rd., P.O. Box 108, Pleasant Hill, TN 38578-0108; (615) 277-3722.

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