Stretch it, squish it, mound it, pound it...it's fine fescue

Used alone or in a mixture, fine fescues adapt to virtually any cool-season golf course setting.

by Larry Kassell

■ The game of golf began 600 years ago on wind-sculpted land connecting the Scottish seashore with fertile farmland. This area was called "the links," and was covered with native, fine fescue grasses.

Today's course designers and architects stretch, squish, sand, pound, mound, lake, creek, tree and otherwise rearrange many of the features found on the first course in attempts to challenge golfers and help Mother Nature develop land in ways which may never have occurred to her otherwise. With today's dramatic changes in technology, techniques and turfgrasses, one facet of modern golf course design remains virtually unchanged—the low maintenance, shade- and drought- tolerant fine fescue turfgrasses.

Once again, chewings, creeping red, hard and sheeps fescue are an important part of golf course design.

A classic look—Architect Steve Smyers includes fine fescue mixtures in the extreme roughs of his course designs for the traditional windswept Scottish look on his first links-type course, Wolf Run Golf Club, in Zionsville, Ind.

His recent Chart Hills Golf Club, in Kent, England was designed with golfer Nick Faldo.

Wolf Run superintendent Joe Kosoglov, who has been at the course since its beginning phases in 1987, seeded the roughs at 6 lbs. per 1000 sq.ft. with a blend of sheeps, hard and creeping red fescue. Kosoglov says the tight growth habit of the established turf chokes out weeds, and shade screens crabgrass and broadleafs.

"The long grass carpets some of the irregular slopes, and the 18-inch mature height and texture contrasts dramatically with the closely-mowed creeping bentgrass tees, fairways and greens," Kosoglov says. "The waving golden seedheads throughout the summer are a simply gorgeous sight."

Kosoglov uses from one-third to one-quarter less fertilizer on the fescues than he does on other cool-season turf, and he mows it every other year.

"The tall roughs come within 20 feet of the fairways for a target golf effect. We use Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescue mowed at two inches for the short rough, offering a more forgiving lie for the slightly errant golf shot."

High Point Golf Club in Williamsburg, Mich., was Tom Doak's first golf course design. The course is entirely fine fescue except for the creeping bentgrass tees and greens. Design considerations were an orchard on the relatively flat front nine, and a tree plantation and old growth hardwoods on the hilly back nine. Shade was thus very much a factor in grass specification.

"Much of the back side is on extremely contoured land, and water can be a problem," says Doug Sarto, superintendent at High Point.

"The fine fescue performs admirably under the heat, cold, drought, shade and humidity extremes we experience near Lake Michigan and Grand Travers Bay."

Varied mowing heights—The short roughs are maintained at two inches and the fairways are mowed at 1⅛ inch. Sarto enjoys the luxury of being able to vary the cutting height so dramatically.

"It's a pleasure to work with, compared to some more demanding species," he notes.

Illinois superintendent David Harper: Fescues are very disease resistant.

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Fine fescue performs admirably under a variety of temperature extremes at High Point Country Club, even when mowed at 1⅛ inch. *Photos by Larry Kassell*

Superintendent David Harper at Effingham Country Club, Effingham, Ill., maintains perennial ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrass, creeping bentgrass and fine fescue. He developed and implemented a three-year plan to reduce maintenance and labor costs by planting the wooded areas on his course with fine fescues.

An added benefit is the fescue's attractive appearance compared to the prior *Poa annua* and nutsedge.

He lightly scores the earth with a hay rake, then verticuts, and broadcasts a blend of one-third each of chewings, creeping and hard fescues at 5 lbs./1000 sq. ft.

"I blend my own because the commercial mixture available used some unimproved, imported seed for economy," says Harper. "I felt the real economy was in quality Oregon-grown seed from the start."

Harper lets the seed establish over the first year. In the second year, he broadcasts a light application of a granular, selective broadleaf control product—a liquid formulation caused a slight discoloration of the fescue leaves—and overseeds with the fine fescue blend.

"By the third year, the woods are nearly all fine fescue, and overseeding was a finishing touch," says Harper. "The established roots go about a foot deep and do not require additional water. I used to mow what was in the dense wooded areas every 30 days. Now, it's once or twice a year, and the established fescue pretty much keeps the weeds out. Golfers lose fewer balls in the trees, and play has speeded up to where we can add a few new members.

Disease tolerant—Even with 98 percent humidity, Harper has not had to rely on fungicides for the fescues, and the species doesn't compete with the nearby trees for nourishment.

"Fine fescues also mix well with other species of cool-season grasses," says Dave Nelson of the Oregon Fine Fescue Commission.

"We recommend about a third chewings and creeping red fescue and a third Kentucky bluegrass and a third perennial ryegrass for most northern turfgrass applications like golf clubhouse grounds, fairways, home lawns and parks."

Nelson says the fescues add strength in shady, dry and low-fertilized areas, thereby complementing the strengths of rye and bluegrass.

—The author is president of Kassell Concepts, a commercial photography and publication design company in Silverton, Ore. His photography has appeared often in this magazine.

Big jump in bentgrass is predicted

■ Golf course superintendents can expect new varieties of bentgrasses offering better disease resistance, denser and dwarfer growth, and also less grain, says turfgrass breeders at two of America's top turf seed companies.

Dr. Richard Hurley, Lofts, Inc., spoke at the New Jersey Turfgrass Expo and Dr. Meyer, Turf Seed Inc., spoke at the North Central Turfgrass Expo this fall. Their comments gave golf course superintendents everywhere reason to smile.

"Bents have a tremendous amount of diversity within the species," said Hurley. Citing the history of bentgrass, he added, "Penncross in 1955 was the real breakthrough." But, he added, the new bents offer advantages which the older bents—Penncross included—don't.

In 1992, Hurley collected more than 60 selections during a visit to Atlanta Athletic

Bentgrass development

RELEASE YEAR	VARIETY	DEVELOPER
1923	Seaside	--
1955	Penncross	Penn State Univ.
1978	Penneagle	Penn State Univ.
1986	Pennlinks	Penn State Univ.
1987	Cobra	Rutgers Univ.
1987	SR1020	Univ. of Arizona
1987	Putter	Washington St. Univ.
1988	Providence	Univ. of Arizona
1990	Lopez	Fine Lawn Research
1990	Southshore	Lofts; Rutgers Univ.
1993	Crenshaw	Texas A&M Univ.

Source: Dr. Rich Hurley