

Tall fescue: survival of the fittest

by JERRY ROCHE / Editor-in-Chief

If the turf you're maintaining just doesn't seem to be able to stand up to extremes in either the weather or other environmental stresses, turf-type tall fescue may be an alternative.

Whether the turf is high maintenance or low maintenance, tall fescue can work, according to Dr. A.J. Powell of the University of Kentucky.

"Tall fescue is sort of the IPM grass," Powell contends. "If you had no pesticides to use, I think you might choose tall fescue. It has the ability to survive many situations.

"We're seeing new tall fescues almost by the week, and they're looking better all the time. Turf breeders have really done a fine job [in the areas of] texture and color. Most of the newer types are not as yellow as their predecessors in late May and early June, and texture is only something you see up close, so many times it's less important."

Some drawbacks to tall fescue as your turf of choice:

1) Brown patch is a major problem, and it's increasing.

2) It doesn't do well in thatchy areas, because thatch pulls the moisture from the seed.

3) New sod has to be watered even more than Kentucky bluegrass.

4) It's difficult to get slit-seeded into ryegrass.

5) Other, very minor, problems: white grubs, armyworms, drought/heat thinning, seedling freeze-out, seed dormancy, allelopathy.

Powell has tested brown patch on tall fescue. "If you can bring your mowing height down and increase your frequency, I guarantee that you'll have fewer brown patch problems," he says.

"You're also going to have more of a problem when you have higher nitrogen rates.

But where we could irrigate it when it was under stress, there was less brown patch."

Powell notes that dwarf-type tall fescues and what are known as "double-dwarfs" grow less tall.

"There are several reasons I'm not completely sold on them, though," he observes. "First, they are generally even more susceptible to brown patch. They don't germinate as quickly, and they are slower to start in the spring and slower to establish." They also generally don't grow as long into the autumn, Powell says.

Academic description

According to the texts, the closer you grow tall fescue cultivars to the transition zone, the better off you will be. In cooler parts of the country, it is susceptible to low temperature injury, which causes it to gradually thin out.

Tall fescue is fairly heat-tolerant compared to most cool-season grasses, and its drought and wear tolerance is very good.

Generally speaking, tall fescues respond very nicely to occasional watering, though they do not demand irrigation.

In the early days of turf-type tall fescue development, they generally had very coarse leaves and lacked the color qualities of, say, bluegrass or ryegrass. That made early cultivars perfect for sports fields, playgrounds and roadsides.

However, the newer cultivars exhibit much better color, and many rival bluegrass and ryegrass in that respect. Leaves are also not quite as coarse and thick, mak-

1994 NATIONAL TALL FESCUE EVALUATIONS (NTEP)

ENTRIES, MEAN RATINGS, SPONSORS (LSD=0.1)

6.2 Jaguar 3 (Zajac)

6.1 Houndog V (International), Falcon II (Burlingham), Southern Choice (Burlingham), Gen-91 (Genesis), Crossfire II (Pickseed West), Coyote (Zajac)

6.0 Finelawn Petite (Finelawn Research), Pixie (Jacklin), MB-22-92 (Burlingham), Lancer (Lesco), Rebel Jr. (Lofts), Coronado (Pure Seed)

5.9 Lexus (Barenbrug), Empress (Zajac), Marksman (Burlingham), Apache II (Pure Seed), Toma-hawk (Turf-Seed), Grande (Seed Research), Debutante (Willamette), Micro DD (Turf Merchants), Pyramid (Olsen-Fennel), Duster (Pennington), Gazelle (Zajac), Starlet (Burlingham), Virtue (Pennington)

5.8 Titan 2 (Smith), Silverado (Turf-Seed), Montauk (Cascade), Palisades (Olsen-Fennel), Rebel 3D (Lofts), Duke (Cascade), Adobe (Scott's), Guardian (Roberts), Bonsai Plus (Turf Merchants), SR8200 (Seed Research), Trailblazer II (Lesco), Shortstop (Pickseed West), Vegas (Barenbrug), Eldorado (Turf-Seed), Cochise (Ampac), Alamo (Medalist), Safari (Turf-Seed), Leprechaun (Roberts), SR8300 (Seed Research), OFI-ATK (Olsen-Fennel)

5.7 Avanti (Davenport), Finelawn 88 (Finelawn Research), Austin (Barenbrug), Kittyhawk (Smith)

5.6 Bonsai (Turf Merchants, standard entry), Monarch (Turf-Seed), Olympic II (Turf-Seed), Aztec (Scott's), Astro 2000 (Green)

5.5 Phoenix (Barenbrug/Normarc), Bonanza (standard entry)

5.3 Arid (Jacklin, standard entry), Twilight (Turf Merchants)

5.2 Falcon (Burlingham, standard entry)

5.1 Anthem (Green)

4.4 KY-31 without endophyte (standard entry)

4.3 KY-31 with endophyte (standard entry)

ing newer cultivars a very good choice for home lawns in both cool-season areas and, especially, in the Mid-Atlantic states and other parts of the transition zone. □

TOP CULTIVARS AT SELECTED EVALUATION SITES

ALABAMA

Kittyhawk	5.7
Gazelle	5.6
Cochise	5.6
Pixie	5.5
Shortstop	5.5
Leprechaun	5.5
Shenandoah	5.5
Bonanza	5.5

ARKANSAS

Coyote	8.5
Shortstop	8.1
Lancer	7.9
Coronado	7.9
Lexus	7.9
Gazelle	7.7
Crossfire	7.6
Empress	7.5
Leprechaun	7.5

ARIZONA

MB-22-92	6.8
Jaguar 3	6.6
Gen-91	6.4
Pyramid	6.4
Crossfire II	6.3
Grande	6.3
Coronado	6.1
Empress	6.1
Tomahawk	6.1
Monarch	6.1

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Empress	6.1
Adobe	6.1
Bonsai	6.1
Lexus	6.0
Pyramid	6.0

CALIFORNIA

Jaguar 3	7.4
So. Choice	7.4
Lancer	7.4
Micro DD	7.4
Pyramid	7.4
Gazelle	7.4

DIS. COLUMBIA

Arid	4.4
Jaguar 3	4.1
Anthem	3.9
Titan 23	3.7
Guardian	3.5
Alamo	3.5
SR8300	3.5
OFI-ATK	3.5
Phoenix	3.5

GEORGIA

Silverado	5.1
MB-22-92	5.0

Marksman	5.0	SR8300	6.6
Adobe	5.0	Shenandoah	6.6
Twilight	5.0		

MICHIGAN

Jaguar 3	7.2
Finelawn Petite	7.2
Phoenix	7.1
Shenandoah	7.0
Gen-91	6.9
Titan 2	6.9
Trailblazer II	6.9
Safari	6.9

MISSOURI

Rebel Jr.	7.7
Lexus	7.6
Jaguar 3	7.5
Gen-91	7.5
Apache II	7.5
Eldorado	7.5
Leprechaun	7.5
SR8300	7.5
Phoenix	7.5

NEBRASKA

MB-22-92	6.8
Falcon II	6.7
S. Choice	6.7
Lexus	6.7
Bonsai	6.7
Finelawn Pet.	6.6
Lancer	6.6
Houndog V	6.5
Marksman	6.5
Grande	6.5

NEVADA

Montauk	6.6
Lancer	6.4
So. Choice	6.3
Safari	6.3
Bonanza II	6.3
Falcon II	6.2
Austin	6.2
Gen-91	6.1
Alamo	6.1
Kittyhawk	6.1
Bonanza	6.1

NEW JERSEY

Crossfire II	6.2
Houndog V	6.1
Jaguar 3	5.9
Coronado	5.7
Falcon II	5.5
So. Choice	5.5
Coyote	5.5
Pixie	5.5
Gen-91	5.4
Lexus	5.2
Marksman	5.2

NEW YORK

Astro 2000	5.4
Marksman	5.1
Olympic II	5.1
Titan II	4.8
Vegas	4.9
Austin	4.8
Phoenix	4.8
Houndog V	4.6
Pixie	4.6
MB-22-92	4.6
Bonanza	4.6

PENNSYLVANIA

Houndog V	7.8
MB-22-92	7.8
Marksman	7.8
Jaguar 3	7.6
S. Choice	7.6
Grande	7.6
Montauk	7.6

RHODE ISLAND

So. Choice	6.3
Aztec	6.2
Jaguar 3	6.1
Coyote	6.1
Alamo	6.1
Finelawn 88	6.1

SO. DAKOTA

Coyote	6.5
Jaguar 3	6.4
MB-22-92	6.4
Titan 2	6.4
Pyramid	6.2
Coronado	6.1
Tomahawk	6.1
Silverado	6.1
Eldorado	6.1
Leprechaun	6.1
Finelawn 88	6.1
Arid	6.1

TEXAS

Marksman	7.2
Phoenix	7.2
MB-22-92	7.1
Cochise	7.1
SR8300	7.1
OFI-ATK	7.1

USDA-MD.

(high maint.)	
Houndog V	7.8
Falcon II	7.8
Crossfire II	7.8
Jaguar 3	7.7
Pixie	7.6
So. Choice	7.5
Coyote	7.5
Gen-91	7.4
Lexus	7.4
Tomahawk	7.4

USDA-MD.

(low maint.)	
Gen-91	7.1
Finelawn Petite	7.0
So. Choice	6.8
Lexus	6.7
Houndog V	6.6
Coyote	6.6

VIRGINIA

Crossfire II	5.8
Duster	5.8
Houndog V	5.7
Falcon II	5.7
Apache II	5.7
Gazelle	5.7
Gen-91	5.6
Coronado	5.6
Jaguar 3	5.5
So. Choice	5.5
Silverado	5.5

WASHINGTON

Finelawn Petite	6.0
Lancer	6.0
Gazelle	6.0
So. Choice	5.9
Gen-91	5.9
Empress	5.9

WISCONSIN

Lexus	8.1
Gazelle	8.0
Coyote	7.9
Finelawn Pet.	7.8
Coronado	7.8
Marksman	7.8
Tomahawk	7.8

Evaluation sites listed

above: Auburn University, Ala.; Fayetteville, Ark. (full sun); Tucson, Ariz.; Vancouver, B.C.; Santa Clara, Calif; District of Columbia; Griffin, Ga. (high pH); Urbana, Ill.; West Lafayette, Ind.; Wichita, Kans.; Lexington, Ky.; USDA, Beltsville, Md.; Deerfield, Mass.; East Lansing, Mich.; Mississippi State, Miss.; Columbia, Mo.; Lincoln, Neb. (high maintenance); Reno, Nev.; North Brunswick, N.J.; Ithaca, N.Y.; University Park, Pa. (medium maintenance); Kingston, R.I.; Brookings, S.D.; Dallas, Tex.; Blacksburg, Va.; Pullman, Wash.; Madison, Wisc.

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