

CUTTS

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What About Tall Fescues for New York State?

The very aggressive marketing of tall fescue by seed companies appears to be having an impact in New York State. More than ever I am seeing tall fescue and mixes containing tall fescue being written into construction specifications. Touted as a wear tolerant, low maintenance grass, tall fescue is being used in many situations where Kentucky bluegrass or perennial ryegrass have been used in the past. What about tall fescue? Is it all that it is cracked up to be? More important, is it a superior replacement to other grasses typically used in New York? ■

Tall fescue use seems to be making its biggest gains on sports fields and school grounds. It is a grass that is undeniably one of the toughest, most wear tolerant grasses. It is a relatively easy grass to establish, provided that soil temperatures are warm. Thus, like ryegrass, it is well suited for the frequent overseeding requirements of multi-use fields. The newer cultivars are very attractive, often looking like Kentucky bluegrass when seeded at heavy rates.

Low Maintenance

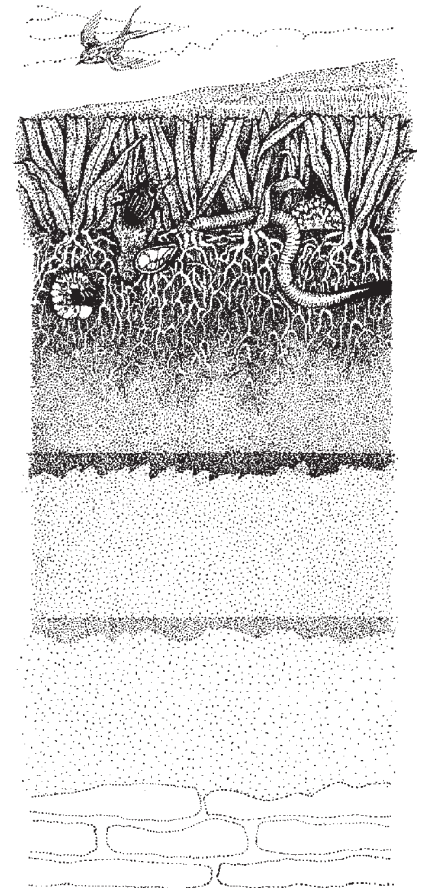
Tall fescue is an extremely drought tolerant grass and is able to maintain its color and vigor without irrigation much further into a drought period than other cool season grasses. Tall fescue is able to avoid drought because it has a very deep, extensive root system. Therefore, it captures moisture at depths in the soil profile that other grasses can not.

While tall fescue has very good drought avoiding qualities, it cannot be called a water conserving

grass. Studies have consistently shown that the water use rates of tall fescue exceed other cool season grasses.

Tall fescue will do well with little fertilizer. One or two fertilizer applications annually at 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet are all that is normally needed to have a quality stand of turf. Also, with the exception of an occasional outbreak of brown patch, tall fescue has few pest problems.

The largest input required in maintaining turfgrass is mowing. Tall fescue has a very fast vertical growth rate, requiring more frequent mowing. The newer dwarf types may have slower growth rates than other tall fescue cultivars, but they still grow much faster than other cool season grasses. A demonstration recently conducted in Rochester by cooperative extension agent Jim Willmott found that the clippings removed off a dwarf tall fescue plot were more than triple that of adjacent fine fescue plots. This very rapid growth rate will not



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