CORNELL UNIVERSITY TURFGRASS TIMES

CUTT

2006 Issue 2 • Volume 17 • Number 2

Festuca:

Versatile, Weed-Suppressive Turfgrasses for Diverse Settings

The presence of a high quality turfgrass in a landscape influences our lives visually, functionally and recreationally. In the United States, there are currently more than 30 million acres of turfgrass including lawns, parks, golf courses, sod farms, industrial and institutional grounds, and highway rights-of way. In New York State alone, over 3.4 million acres have been established in turfgrass (NY State Turfgrass Survey, 2004), and over 18,000 miles of major highways. In all turf settings — especially lawn and roadside turf — weeds are a key pest problem.

A substantial pesticide market (over $2 billion dollars) currently exists for control of weeds, insects and diseases in private and commercial turfgrass settings. Although herbicides continue to be the predominant form of weed management in commercial turf settings, herbicide use in public and private landscapes is increasingly challenged by environmental and health concerns. Consequently, turfgrass managers, including homeowners, are seeking alternative weed management tools.

One preventive strategy to minimize weed infestation is the use of appropriate turf mixtures or cultivars that are well adapted to a given setting for optimal density and growth. Weeds are much less likely to invade a well-managed turf in good condition, maintained with appropriate cultural practices including timely mowing, fertilization and irrigation. In recent years, our research has focused on the selection and utilization of fine leaf fescues as low maintenance, stress tolerant and weed suppressive turfgrasses in landscape and roadside settings.

The genus *Festuca* or fescue represents one of the largest groups of grasses in the tribe *Poaceae*. Approximately 100 different fescue species are currently found in the United States and Europe. If one looks closely at a collection of fescues, it is easy to see that *Festuca* species vary greatly in morphology, cytology and growth habit. Generally, the fescues are divided by appearance and usage patterns into two specific types: fine or coarse leaf fescues.

continued on page 4

This Times

CUTT, "Cornell University Turfgrass Times" is published four times per year by the Turfgrass Science Program at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853. Address correspondence to: Cornell University Turfgrass Times, 134A Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853; phone: (607) 255-1629; email: fsr3@cornell.edu.

Editor: Frank S. Rossi, Ph.D.

Design & Production: Ghostwriters, inc., Ithaca, NY