

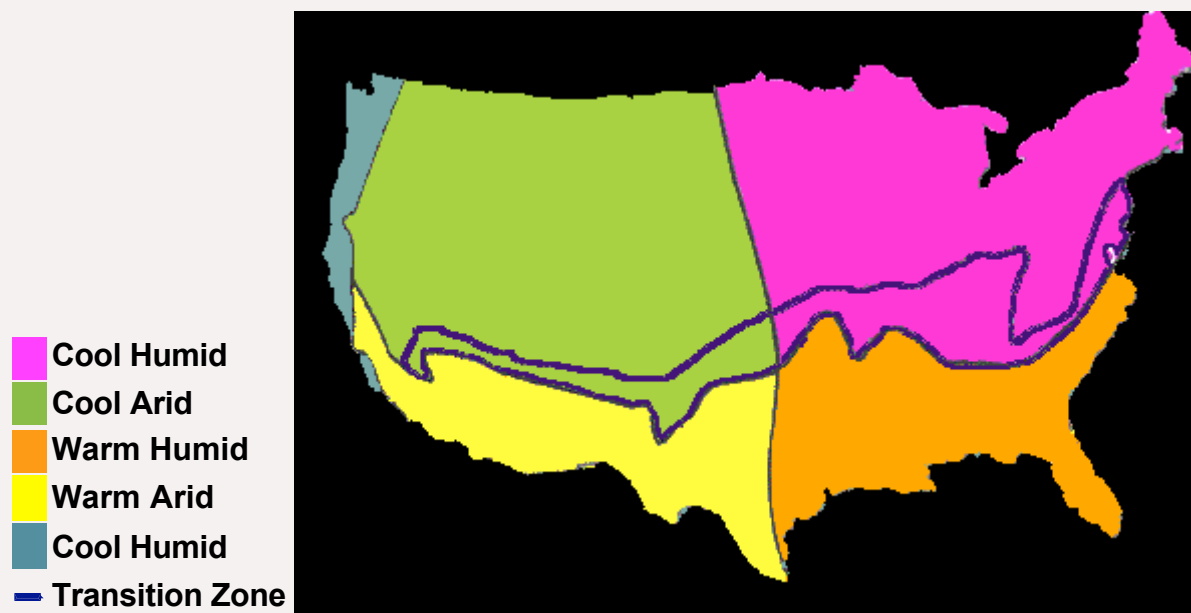


## How To Select The Best Grass For Northern Lawns

### Another Report on Effective Turf Maintenance from the Lawn Institute

**N**ew, improved lawn grass varieties for the 21st century provide you with the latest technological benefits for improving your lawn. These varieties represent a new generation of grasses bred for:

- Lower maintenance
- Water conservation and heat tolerance
- Reduced need for fertilizers and pesticide controls



A majority of homeowners in the northern climatic regions will generally purchase turfgrass sod or lawn seed in mixtures or blends rather than a single variety. Many cool season grasses are compatible and widely used in seed mixtures. Kentucky bluegrass,

fine fescue, perennial ryegrass, and turf type tall fescues varieties can be combined to make excellent mixtures for the northern lawn. A blend is two or more of the same grass specie.

## **Kentucky Bluegrass**

Kentucky bluegrass is the basic grass species for northern lawns. Many older lawns were planted with common Kentucky bluegrass some years ago. In the last few years, there has been a breakthrough in the breeding and development of the new improved bluegrasses.

The new named bluegrass varieties found in premium blends and mixtures have been developed with more heat and drought tolerance, and with greater insect and disease resistance. This makes the turf more persistent in crowding out weeds throughout the year. In seed mixtures, Kentucky bluegrass should be the dominant type grass seed.

## **Perennial Ryegrass**

The new turf type perennial ryegrasses are the most versatile of the lawngrasses. They germinate rapidly and are often used in mixtures with the improved Kentucky bluegrasses. Perennial ryegrass germinates faster than Kentucky bluegrasses, which helps to prevent soil erosion during lawn establishment. The other valuable quality is that perennial ryegrass normally has better wear tolerance than Kentucky bluegrass.

## **Fine Fescues**

There are several grasses that are called fine fescue. The most widely used is creeping red fescue. Its shade and drought tolerance makes it a popular variety in northern seed mixtures. Chewings fescue also is a fine fescue with good drought tolerance and is frequently used in mixtures. Neither of these grasses are routinely seeded alone, but generally used with Kentucky bluegrass.

## **Tall Fescue**

Tall fescue has traditionally been used in the transition zone and upper south, but the development of new turf-type tall fescues has made them compatible in the cool, humid regions as well. Tall fescues have good heat and drought tolerance.

These grasses have a large root system and tend to grow well with less irrigation during hot summer weather and dry spells. The new turf type tall fescues often are sold as blends of two or more named varieties. However, mixtures in combination with Kentucky bluegrass are becoming more common.

## **Making the Lawn Seed Decision**

There are a few environmental questions that you as a homeowner need to answer before making a decision on what turfgrass sod seed to buy. Does the majority of your

lawn receive a lot of sun? Do you have a substantial amount of shade? Will you have a considerable amount of traffic and play on the lawn? Do you plan to regularly irrigate the lawn?

Answers to these questions will help you and the retailer make a better decision as to which mixture or blend to buy. Here are some general guidelines for your purchase:

**Generally sunny with irrigation** - In the northern portions of cool humid, semi-arid, and inter-mountain areas, consider a blend of improved Kentucky bluegrasses or a mixture of Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescue. In the southern portion of the cool humid and semi-arid areas, look for an improved Kentucky bluegrass blend with improved perennial ryegrass.

**A considerable amount of shade** - In the northern portions, semi-arid, and inter-mountain areas, look for an improved Kentucky bluegrass blend, combined with a higher percentage of fine fescue.

In the southern portion of the area, look for a mixture of improved Kentucky bluegrass, improved perennial ryegrass, and improved fine fescue. Another option is to use an improved turf type tall fescue blend.

**High traffic and play** - In the northern portion, semi-arid, and inter-mountain areas, look for a mixture of improved Kentucky bluegrasses with a relatively high percentage of improved perennial ryegrass.

In the southern area, once again, look for a mixture of improved Kentucky bluegrasses with a high percentage of improved perennial ryegrass. You can also choose an improved turf type tall fescue variety or blend.

## Make Sure You Buy Quality Seed!

As a homeowner, be wary of low-cost seed mixtures. They often contain common, unadapted, temporary, and low-quality grasses. Improved seed varieties will generally cost a bit more, but within that seed lies the potential for an improved quality of lawn.

Read the seed label and understand what you're getting in the box or bag.

## How to Read a Seed Label

### XYZ Brand Lawn Seed Mixture

<u>Pure Seed</u>	<u>Seed Variety</u>	<u>Germination</u>
60%	Aries Kentucky Bluegrass	85%
15%	Virgo Chewings Fescue	85%
24.55%	Pisces Perennial Ryegrass	90%

**Other Ingredients**

0.26%

0.10%

0.09%

Other crop seed  
Weed seed  
No noxious weed seed  
Inert matter

Tested January, 2000

Lot No. 1002

XYZ Super Seed, Anytown, WA 99001

- Look to see if the varieties are listed by trade name, rather than a generic name like Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, tall fescue, or the Latin name for the species or variety. Avoid packages that state "VNS" or Variety Not Stated.
- Make sure the germination percentage number is high with at least 75% for Kentucky bluegrass, and 85% for perennial ryegrasses, fine fescues, and turf type tall fescues.
- The weed content should not be more than 0.5% and other crop grasses no more than 0.5%.
- Inert matter, which is incapable of growing under any conditions, should be no more than 5%.
- There should not be any noxious weeds stated on the label.
- There are many places where annual grasses are used and are beneficial to the environment, but the permanent lawn is NOT one of these places. When reading the seed label, avoid boxes or bags that list annual grasses at more than 5% by weight of the container, i.e. annual ryegrasses. A small percentage can be helpful for erosion control at establishment but annual grasses do not provide the basis for a healthy, permanent lawn.
- A quality seed mixture or blend should be free of bentgrass and *Poa trivialis* (rough bluegrass). These weedy grasses are particularly difficult to control in a permanent lawn and can quickly deteriorate the quality of the lawn.
- If the seed label indicates these minimum and maximum levels, you can be confident that you are buying a good quality mixture or blend.
- Buy a premium seed variety, mixture, or blend available for your area. The performance and environmental benefits are worth the cost differential for a healthy, attractive lawn. And remember, premium lawn seed is still one of the least costly products you can buy to improve the value and environment of your home and landscape.

**The Lawn Institute  
1855-A Hicks Road  
Rolling Meadows, IL 60008**

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