

RED FESCUE

Festuca rubra L.

plant symbol = FERU2

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program



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 Northeast Wetland Flora
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Uses

Erosion control: Red fescue is an excellent soil binder and used extensively for stabilizing waterways, slopes, banks, cuts, and fills.

Recreation and beautification: This grass is used as a turf for lawns, athletic fields, golf courses, and playgrounds.

Crop: It is used as a cover crop in orchards.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Festuca rubra L., red fescue, is a cool season, sod-forming grass introduced from Europe. Leaves of red fescue are bright green, wiry, and narrow. They are pressed together in a "V" shape and appear nearly round. Stems are usually bent at the reddish or purplish base and grow about 2 feet tall. The panicle seedhead is contracted or narrow.

Adaptation and Distribution

This grass is hardy, wear-resistant, and shade tolerant. It is drought resistant after establishment, and adapted to sandy and acid soils. It prefers well-drained soils, but requires ample moisture for establishment. Its prime area of use in the Northeast consists of New York, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the New England states. In the other states of the Northeast region, the grass is adapted to the cooler zones. In areas of high temperatures and humidity, the grass may turn brown or deteriorate during the summer. It will generally recover in the fall when temperature and moisture conditions are more favorable.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Red fescue is rarely seeded in pure stands. Instead, it is used with grasses and legumes for specific purposes, such as lawns, erosion control, or recreational areas. Seedbed preparation, fertilizing, liming, rate and dates of seeding, and weed control requirements are generally governed by the companion grasses in the mixture. When red fescues are added to a mixture they usually constitute 25 to 60 % of the mixture by weight. In shaded areas, red fescue is often the key grass in the mixture.

Management

To maintain stand vigor and density on lawns and recreational areas, apply fertilizers at the recommended rate annually. For critical erosion areas, less frequent use of fertilizers may be satisfactory. When red fescue dominates a stand, mowing consistently below 1-1/2 inches can cause severe damage to the stand.

Pests and Potential Problems

There are no serious pests of red fescue.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

'Illahee' (England), 'Pennlawn' (Europe), 'Rainier', and 'Trinity'. The common varieties are readily available from commercial sources.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

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