

## Lawn Grass Seed Selection

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

September, and given the weather this year perhaps late August, is the time to plant our new lawns or overseed our thin lawns. Going to the garden store or hardware store to buy some grass seed can become a bit daunting as we seem to have a plethora of choices. While many of these grass seed packages may have simple sounding names like Sunny Spot or Dense Shade Mix, that doesn't really tell you anything so you have to dig a little deeper.

It's probably easiest to tell you first what good choices are for your lawn. For fall planting and for all around lawn situations, we recommend improved tall fescue varieties or Kentucky bluegrass varieties. Within that limited sounding categories though, are several hundred different cultivars. The named fescue and bluegrass cultivars would fill several pages of a newspaper! Fortunately, most of the time companies will create blends of four or five cultivars of tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass that capitalize on the strengths of several cultivars to make sure that the blend is well adapted to numerous locations around the area.

What you want to do when shopping for grass seed is to pay attention to the fine print. Each bag of grass seed has to have a label saying what species and varieties are in the package as well as how much other stuff. The label will also tell you where the grass seed was produced and what the germination of each cultivar was when tested. It will also tell you when it was packaged so you can see if you have current year's seed or if someone is trying to get rid of some old supply.

Most grass seed packages will have very few weed seeds in them because that just isn't good advertising. What trips up many people is the category "crop seed". This can be any plant species that may be used in cultivation somewhere. You want this to be zero percent. There is a common contaminant, especially with an old tall fescue variety called K-31, called orchardgrass. In some parts of the country, orchardgrass is used as cattle pasture. In lawns, it grows faster and is lighter green than fescue or bluegrass. It is an unattractive species of grass to have in your lawn.

I was recently looking at a bag of K-31 tall fescue which had 2% other crop seed. Using a standard seeding rate of six pounds of tall fescue seed per 1,000 square feet you come up with about 1.4 million seeds per 1,000 square feet. If that seed batch had 2% contamination, you're planting over 25,000 orchardgrass seeds per 1,000 square feet. If 1% of those germinated you'd have one orchardgrass plant in every four square feet block. You wouldn't be happy!

Many of the mixes that I examined have annual bluegrass or annual ryegrass. The fact that it is a species that says "annual" should be a warning to avoid as it will only live one year. It may grow fast, but you're replanting next year. Some mixes have perennial ryegrass. This is a good lawn grass in cooler, moisture, more humid climates. It may look good for a year or two, but a good long hot dry spell, and it's gone! You'll also find other fescue species like creeping red fescue, hard fescue, Chewing's Fescue or sheep fescue. These are all true sod forming fine leaf fescue species that are beautiful, but not well suited to our hot weather.

So yes, there are a lot of grass seed choices to choose from and most of them I can not recommend for normal use around here. Buy a good improved tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass blend. Plant it with a power seeder at the proper rate and then mow it tall. All of these together should give you a lawn that you will be happy with!