

## Start a Better Lawn with Better Grass Seed

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Fall is the time that homeowners need to work on their lawn to get it in better shape for next year. For some homeowners that will include reseeding or overseeding parts of their lawn. Having a successful lawn seeding entails a whole lot more than just going to the store, buying the cheapest bag of seed you can find and tossing it out on the lawn. In fact, that approach is the best way to have a total failure and leads to disappointment and wasted time and money.

While the heart of this column is about how to select high quality grass seed, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention just a couple of practical lawn seeding considerations. For a successful seeding you have to get the seed into the soil. In small areas of bare soil it can be raked in. But for overseeding or new seedings, you are well advised to use a powerseeder that uses spinning blades to slash grooves in the soil surface that the seed drops into. A soil test is also recommended to make sure you have adequate phosphorus levels. In the absence of a soil test, use a starter fertilizer at the recommended rate. Do not use any herbicides for weed control until the lawn has been mowed at least three times this fall.

When you buy grass seed it is important that you read the fine print on the label. Except in very unusual circumstances you should be planting improved tall fescue or Kentucky Bluegrass. There are many other turf grass species out there including perennial ryegrass, fine-leaved fescue, creeping red fescue, etc., but all of these are poorly adapted to our Kansas climate. They may emerge quickly and look good, but they simply don't have the longevity and survival that is needed.

By law, every bag of seed has to have a label with a lot of information on it. The tag will first tell you what kind of seed is in the bag. It will be a species name and a cultivar and will be something like Kenblue Kentucky Bluegrass or Wolfpack Tall Fescue. It will tell you what percent of the entire package is that cultivar as well as the germination percent and where the seed was grown. Many companies name their seed blends with words like Sun and Shade Mix or Quick Fix Mix or almost anything. Ignore those names as they don't really tell you what's in the mix. If the label doesn't indicate that it is at least 90% tall fescue or bluegrass, just put it back on the shelf.

Next look on the label at the section labeled "Other ingredients". By law, the seed mix can not contain noxious weed seed, but this will be spelled out on the label. There may be a small amount of weed seed, but it is usually going to be a very low amount. If it's more than 0.1%, don't buy it! Inert matter is just parts of plants other than seed. Unless it's more than 3 or 4%, don't worry about it. Then there will be a category called "Other Crop Seed". This is the one you really won't to be concerned about. This is any other plant species that is ever grown as a crop, including other grass species. The most common contaminant that would be under this category is orchardgrass. It's a very common grass seed contaminant and you DO NOT want this in your yard! So look for seed blends that have 0.0% other crop seed or at less than a tenth of a percent other crop seed. You will likely find K-31 tall fescue for sale. This is fine for outlying areas but I would not plant it in your front yard.

There are some very high quality grass seed blends out there in our local stores. You will likely pay more for them, but in the end they are worth it. The success of any lawn seeding is directly related to the quality of the grass seed you start with. Start with a good foundation, buy quality seed!