



# Introduced Cool-Season Grass Series

Annual Ryegrass

**Tall Fescue**

Wheat

Oats

Rye



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# Introduced Cool-Season Grasses of Louisiana

## Fact Sheet

## Tall Fescue

### Description

Tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) is a cool-season perennial grass species introduced from Europe in the early 1800's.



It is a bunch-grass that stands 3 to 4 feet in height; however, if kept mowed or grazed it will form an even sod. Tall fescue has numerous broad, shiny, ribbed leaves that are dark green in color. Individual plants may or may not have short rhizomes. It has a branched, panicle-type seed head 10-35 cm in length.



### Adaptability

Tall fescue grows best on deep, moist, clayey or loamy soils and is generally considered to be better adapted to the northern part of the state. However, it is used across the entire state in critical areas for erosion control. Tall fescue is not currently used extensively for grazing in Louisiana; however, research by the LSU Ag-Center shows that it can be a viable alternative. Tall fescue's large rooting structure is thought to allow this species to grow

across many different soil types and growing conditions. It can grow on strongly acid to alkaline (pH = 4.7-9.5) soils. It has good drought tolerance, surviving dry periods in a dormant state. Tall fescue also grows well in soils too wet for other forages, but it will not tolerate flooded conditions. A fungal endophyte is usually associated with tall fescue that improves its sustainability in a stand. However, the endophyte produces alkaloids that are toxic to livestock and causes various health problems. There are endophyte-free, or low toxicity endophyte varieties available. In Louisiana, three cultivars are generally accepted for use: 'Kentucky-31', 'Georgia 5', and 'Jesup'.

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## Establishment

Fescue establishes best in a well-fertilized, well-prepared seedbed. The soil should be tilled to 4-6 inches, seed planted and firmed (cultipacked). In Louisiana, 30 pounds of PLS (pure live seed) should be seeded per acre. Planted in combination with a clover, 20 PLS pounds will be sufficient for stand establishment. The seed should be planted to a depth of ¼ to ½ inch.

The optimum planting dates in Louisiana are from September through October. Fertilization rates should be based on current soil tests and recommendations for desired purpose.

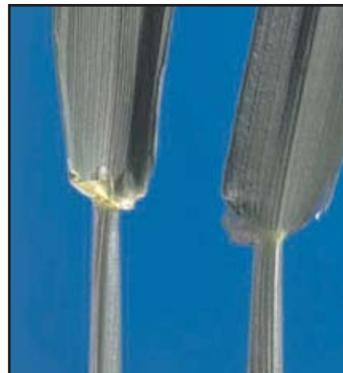
## Management

As a perennial, tall fescue offers some advantages over annual seeding of pastures. These advantages include elimination of annual seeding costs and providing a firm sod that can better withstand grazing during wet weather. Fescue normally provides grazing from mid-February until early June and from September until December. Because it is a perennial it may produce more forage in the fall than annual ryegrass. Tall fescue should be rested during the summer months from July to September. Since tall fescue is slow to establish, new stands can be seriously damaged by overgrazing or grazing too soon. However, close grazing (down to 3 inches) of well-established stands is a good management practice. After establishment, fescue is tolerant of continuous close grazing and is superior to many other cool-season grasses in livestock-carrying capacity. Tall fescue readily responds to nitrogen fertilization. Tall fescue also can be used as a hay crop. The first harvest of hay should be cut in the late bloom stage for best quality just at the first sign of seed head formation. Delayed haying to get a seed crop results in very poor quality forage.

When grazing endophyte-infected tall fescue, care should be taken to minimize its affect on animal health and performance. Do not graze endophyte-infected tall fescue during periods of high temperature and humidity. Do not allow grazing of seed heads. Additionally, having a diversity of species in association with tall fescue will decrease the toxic effects of the endophyte. With the introduction of new endophyte-free varieties that will persist and produce without the toxicity, tall fescue can produce better daily gains and better milk production for livestock.

## Uses

Tall fescue is used by livestock producers as a cool-season perennial forage. It can easily be interseeded with clover varieties for improved forage quality. This species is commonly used as a turf grass and where erosion control is needed.



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## Where To Get Help:

For more information about tall fescue, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or visit following websites:  
<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>  
<http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov>