

Arkansas Grazing Lands Technical Note 3.1

Rye and Ryegrass...Is there a Difference? September 20th, 2015

Introduction

Cereal rye and ryegrass are often mistaken for each other due to similarities in their name. These are completely different forages. The intent of this technical note is to briefly explain each forage so differences are understood. AR NRCS field office staff are expected to know the difference and accurately communicate the differences to producers.

Note: Currently, no financial assistance is available through EQIP for either cereal rye or ryegrass under Conservation Practice Standard Forage and Biomass Planting (512).

Cereal Rye (*Secale cereal L.*)

Description

Cereal rye, commonly referred to as rye, is an erect annual with flat leaf blades and dense flower spikes. Each large spike consists of many 2-flowered spikelets with long awns.

Cereal rye commonly grows 2 to 4 feet tall in a bunch form.



Major Uses

Cereal rye is predominantly used for cool season forage. Erosion control is another possibility.

Quick Facts

- Cereal rye is an introduced cool season annual grass.
- Cereal rye can withstand cooler temperatures better than ryegrass, wheat, and oats.
- Cereal rye produces a seed head earlier in the year than other cool season annuals.
- Nutritional quality and palatability sharply declines as cereal rye matures.
- Cereal rye is better adapted to well-drained soils.
- Cereal rye is more tolerant to acidic soils compared to wheat or oats.
- Cereal rye generally grows much taller than ryegrass.
- Cereal rye is not an aggressive re-seeder such as annual ryegrass.
- Cereal rye seed is cheaper than wheat seed.
- Cereal rye seed needs to be planted deeper than ryegrass. Approximately 1-inch deep.



Varieties developed for Forage

- Koolgrazer
- Elbon
- Maton
- Wintergrazer 70

Ryegrass (*Lolium L.*)

Description

Ryegrass can be either perennial or annual. Arkansas NRCS recommends annual ryegrass. Annual ryegrass will only be discussed within this section unless noted otherwise.

Annual ryegrass has dark and shiny leaves. The edges are smooth with small, clasping auricles. Perennial ryegrass has non-clasping auricles.



Annual Ryegrass

Seed heads are spikes with spikelet's growing edgewise to the stem.

- Annual ryegrass has 9 to 15 seed/spikelets with awns on the seed.
- Perennial ryegrass has 7 to 9 seed/spikelets without awns on the seed.



Annual Ryegrass

Annual ryegrass commonly grows 2 to 3 feet tall in a bunch form.

Major Uses

Annual ryegrass is predominantly used for cool season forage and hay. Erosion control is another possibility.

Quick Facts

- Annual ryegrass is an introduced cool season annual grass.
- Annual ryegrass is a prolific re-seeder.
- Annual ryegrass matures later than cool season small grain forages.
- Great choice for emergency forage plantings.
- Generally cheaper to seed compared to other small grain forages.
- The aggressive nature of annual ryegrass may suppress desirable and non-desirable broadleaf plants.
- The late growth pattern may slow emergence of warm season forages. Management can be adjusted to alleviate this problem.
- Seed depth for annual ryegrass should not be no greater than ½ inch. Seeding less than ½ inch is typical and often successful.



Varieties Developed for Forage*

- Marshall
- Jackson
- Surrey
- Rustmaster
- Gulf
- Multimo
- Tetrablend 444
- Florida 80
- Big Daddy
- Stampede
- Passerel
- Ribeye
- Rio
- Winter Hawk
- Stiker
- Nelson

* Evaluation of the cold tolerance for specific varieties is important depending on regions of Arkansas.

References

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