

Texas A&M Grass Images, Bioinformatics Working Group, photo from Forages 5th Edition, CD Companion

TALL FESCUE

Description: Tall Fescue is a deep-rooted cool season perennial bunch grass. Young plants resemble annual ryegrass. Furnishes forage from fall to early spring.

General Comments- Fescue is the most commonly planted improved forage in the United States. Due to summer heat and local grazing practices, fescue is not as popular in East Texas. Fescue is an option that many livestock managers in East Texas should consider. Basic criteria for successful fescue in East Texas are (1) suitable soils (see adaptation), (2) correct variety and (3) a summer fallow period excluding both livestock and mowing.

Fungus (Endophyte) Infected versus Fungus-Free- Fescue seed is sold as either fungus (endophyte) or fungus (endophyte)-free. The fungus free fescue is essential in all horse pastures. Mares grazing fungus fescue will abort nearly 100 percent of the time. The fungus causes less severe problems in cattle, depending on percentage of fungus-infected fescue in the diet. However, cattle grazing exclusively on infected fescue will experience severe problems (i.e. fescue foot, summer slump, severe gain reductions, reduction in calving percentages and other problems). All existing fescue pastures should be forage tested to determine the percent fungus. Fungus-free fescue stands are more heavily grazed and, therefore, are not as "hardy" as infected stands. It is also suggested that the endophyte provides some protection from nematodes, insects and disease.

There are no varieties of fescue which are resistant to the fungus. Depending on the variety, seed bought commercially can be either fungus-free or fungus-infected, depending on the source of the seed.

Varieties- Fawn seems to be more drought tolerant. KY-31, Forager, Kenhy, AU Triumph, Jesup, and Johnstone are common. Triumph and Fawn appear to be the best adapted to East Texas.

Adaptation- Fescue requires a good fertility level and is best adapted to bottomland soils and clay, clay loam and loam upland soils. Fescue will tolerate poorly drained soil conditions.

Planting Dates- 9/1-11/30 (October preferred)

Planting Rates- Endophyte infected varieties - 10.0 lb PLS/Ac, Endophyte free varieties - 25.0 lb PLS/Ac

Seedbed Preparation- Offset or tandem disk land 3 to 6 inches deep according to soil conditions. Allow land to firm from rainfall, or cultipack (roll). A well prepared, weed-free, firm seedbed is important for a successful grass stand. On clay soils, seedbed preparation needs to be done early to allow for rain to "melt" the clods.

Fertilizer and Lime- Fertilizer and lime should be applied at rates recommended from a recent soil test. In the absence of a soil test, apply 40 N, 40 P, and 0 K per acre on clay or clay loam soils and 40 N, 40 P, 40 K per acre on all other soils for establishment. Lime and fertilizer for

establishment are best applied prior to planting and worked into the soil. Once established, fertilizer should be applied according to plant needs and production goals. Target fertilization dates should be October 1 and April 1.

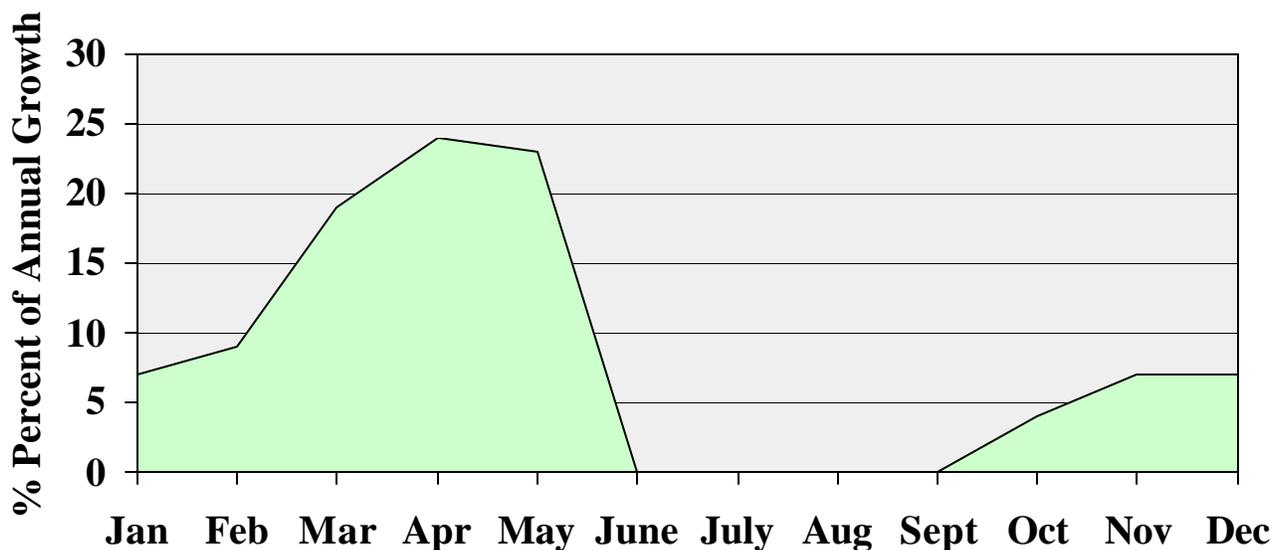
Planting Methods- Seed may be drilled with a grass seed drill or broadcast with a broadcast seeder. The soil should be firmed by rolling with press wheels, cultipacker or roller immediately after seeding. Studies have shown that germination and survival rates of seed planted on a firm seedbed are twice as high as seed planted without rolling.

Management- Best results are obtained if the fescue is not grazed the first year to allow the plants to develop a good, strong root system and form a stand that will help prevent other grasses

from invading. Once established, fescue should not be grazed closer than 3-4 inches. In East Texas, it is recommended “pull-off” fescue earlier than in other portions of the United States. Grazing height should be increased to 6 inches in May to insure that the stand can compete with summer grasses. Fescue will furnish grazing from November until May. Livestock must be removed during the summer. If livestock are allowed to graze during the summer months, the stand will be converted to a common, Dallis, carpet grass pasture. Shredding during the summer is also discouraged unless blade height is held at 8 inches. A good stand of fescue will produce as many days of winter grazing as common Bermuda will produce in the summer.

Fescue may be seeded or overseeded with adapted legumes such as white clover.

Growth Curve For Fescue



Actual growth is dependent upon local climate and seasonal variations in temperature and rainfall. Growth curve assumes adequate fertility based on soil test recommendation.

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