

**A LITTLE BIT COUNTRY
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WILLIAMS COUNTY**

Grasses for Home Lawns

New home owners often ask about types of lawn grasses to plant. For those who ask this time of year I strongly suggest delaying planting until just before freeze-up or next spring. Grass planted now will likely germinate but not establish a strong enough root system to survive cold winter temperatures

The grass species used for home lawns include many cultivars of Kentucky bluegrass, red fescue, chewings fescue, hard fescue, tall fescue, and perennial ryegrass. These are grasses that are most attractive and grow vigorously during the cooler months of spring and autumn. For the home lawn, mixtures are often the best choice, with the Kentucky bluegrass cultivars making up 55 to 60% of the mixture, followed by a cultivar or two of red fescue (30-35%), with perennial ryegrass (10-15%) making up the smallest portion. Generally, after a year or two, perennial ryegrass is crowded out by the more aggressive Kentucky bluegrass. Avoid the "bargain mixes" that have annual or Italian ryegrass (*Lolium multiflorum*) as a component. The coarse grass blades, rank growth, and yellowish-green color do not make a good mix for even temporary mixing.

Kentucky bluegrass is the most adaptable cold-hardy, cool-season grass species to use for home lawns. It has excellent recuperative and competitive capacity. The rhizomatous nature of Kentucky bluegrass allows it to virtually repair itself, a quality that is lacking in most grasses. Red fescue also produces rhizomes, but it lacks the extensive recuperative potential of Kentucky bluegrass. Red fescue is sometimes referred to as creeping red fescue.

Perennial ryegrass and tall fescue are not as cold hardy as Kentucky bluegrass. Care should be taken in choosing cultivar selections of these two species. Only cultivars that have proven winter hardiness in turfgrass trials should be selected.

Buffalograss (*Buchloe dactyloides*), a warm-season stoloniferous species, is often used in conjunction with blue grama grass (*Bouteloua gracilis*) as a xeric lawn. Seed of buffalograss is

expensive and a successful planting is difficult to establish. It stays dormant until the temperatures warm consistently and goes back to dormancy when the temperatures drop to the low 40s. It is the only grass species that is dioecious (male/female plants). It establishes rather quickly from plugs when provided with supplemental irrigation and hand weeding. Blue grama is also a warm-season grass.

For a list of grass varieties evaluated in North Dakota State University Turfgrass trials, ask for publication "Turfgrasses- Establishment and Maintenance for Home Lawns and Athletic Fields" available free of charge by calling this office – 701-577-4595.