

# Alternative Turf: Fine Fescues



Looking for a shade-tolerant, water-conserving grass? Fine fescues may be just the solution. The term “fine fescue” refers to a group of grasses similar in appearance and growth requirements, including hard fescue, sheep fescue, creeping red fescue, slender creeping red fescue, and Chewings fescue. Fine fescues can be purchased as individual species or as grass mixes of several species.



## Benefits

- Fine fescues are the best grass option for shady areas, like under large shade trees. Fine fescue will not grow well under evergreen trees like spruces and some pines.
- Fine fescues grow very well at higher elevations. If your property is above 7,000 feet in elevation, fine fescues may be the best grass option, especially on rocky soils.
- Fine fescues don't require a lot of fertilizer, only half of the normal rate for Kentucky bluegrass lawns.
- They can make an attractive lawn, even on rocky or sandy soils.
- Can be mowed to 2 to 3 inches in height or leave unmowed (will be 6 to 12 inches tall).
- Can make a beautiful stand of mounded unmowed grass planted underneath deciduous trees and shrubs.
- They mix well with wildflowers. Plant wildflower seed at the same time as the grass seed for best results.



## Water savings

- Fine fescues save moderate amounts of water, requiring about three-fourths the water of a traditional Kentucky bluegrass lawn.



*Fine Fescue*

- Requires 18-20 inches of supplemental irrigation during the summer (April through October) to maintain a good appearance. Kentucky bluegrass requires about 25 inches.
- Some fine fescue species are more drought tolerant than others. Sheep fescue and hard fescue are more drought tolerant, while creeping red fescue and Chewings fescue are less drought tolerant.
- Hard fescue is darker green and more heat tolerant, so it makes a good choice for Colorado Springs lawns.
- Sheep fescue has a more blue color and is better suited to naturalized areas.
- Performs best with monthly winter watering from November through April.
- Requires regular watering for several weeks after planting while it forms new roots. In other words, you will not save water until the grass has grown a new root system during the first growing season.

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### Don't use if ...

- Your yard is very hot and sunny. Fine fescues turn brown when the weather gets hotter than 90 degrees.
- Your yard experiences a lot of foot traffic. Fine fescues will thin where traffic is constant or concentrated.
- An upright grass is desired. The blades of fine fescues lay down (appear more floppy) than a traditional lawn. They can be challenging to mow cleanly, especially if the mower's blades are dull.
- Rapid growth is desired. Fine fescues grow slowly. Therefore, they can take a while to recuperate from heat stress, foot traffic or cutting very short.



### Considerations

- Available as seed, not sod or plugs.
- Seed germinates quickly, but takes a while to fill in.
- As with any grass started from seed, requires regular weed control until the grass can outcompete the weeds.
- Can become clumpy or develop a large thatch layer over time.
- Performs best with monthly winter watering from November through April.
- Requires regular watering for several weeks after planting while it forms new roots. In other words, you will not save water until the grass has grown a new root system during the first growing season.



### Installation

- Best time to seed: Aug. 15 through Sept. 30
- For more information from Colorado State University on selection, installation and maintenance, visit [ext.colostate.edu](http://ext.colostate.edu).

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